

March 5, 2020

Mr. Leighton Johnson

To Whom It May Concern:

First, I'd like to thank Representative Porter and Representative Kushner for leading this public hearing for this very worthy cause.

My name is Leighton Johnson and I am here to support HB5389. I know firsthand the barriers that are in place for people who have a criminal record, most especially felonies. I believe all people should be afforded the right to adequate housing, employment, voting rights, student loans, etc.

I'm pretty sure everyone in this room have violated some type of rule, regulation or even committed some form of crime. Whether it be jaywalking, illegally downloading music, taking home company property or using it for your personal use or have done something in their past that is something they would not like to be held accountable for, for the rest of their lives. I believe that if you commit a crime, pay you're debt to society (serve time, pay restitution, change your lifestyle) and still be discriminated against and denied the basic needs that everyone has in order to survive, then you're essentially being sentenced to a life sentence instead of whatever sentence the judge or jury gave you.

I committed an act in my youth that deemed me eligible for a prison sentence which I completed in its entirety. On top of that 10 ½ year sentence, I have a 5-year probation sentence. So, not that it's supposedly all behind me, I'm faced with a lifetime of scrutiny and discrimination when trying to get a job or a loan for a house or apartment, despite the fact that I am no longer engaged in criminal activity, or drug usage. In fact, while doing my sentence, I actually reformed myself and am now an activist, mentor, steering committee member and Education/Outreach Coordinator for StopSolitaryCT. I am also a taxpayer, dad, son, and an overall contributing member of my community and society.

How do legislators and advocates for harsh laws and policies for criminals expect people to strive to be better human beings if they do not allow people to show that they have changed their ways and be included in the workforce and such? I know countless people with felonies who will not even try to go get a job or apply for a loan or for affordable housing because they already believe in their minds that it's a waste of time knowing how often people are said to be "not a good candidate" because of their past. It's unfathomable that anyone would want to keep large portions of populations marginalized like that. It's slavery and re-traumatization all over again on an institutional basis of racism and criminalism (a word that I just coined).

I support HB5389 to the fullest extent and urge everyone in a position of power to get it passed to reconsider your position if you're opposed to it and get it passed. Thank you for your time and consideration. Good day!